



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on August 4, 2011

Republicans Fight for School Choice in 2011

Republican-led state legislatures have stirred more school choice debates this year than ever before, as Republicans seek to reform state budgets and rekindle student achievement. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 30 states have introduced bills this year which would use government funding to send poor and special needs children to private schools. Nine voucher bills were proposed in 2010, of which the sole survivor was a special needs voucher program in Oklahoma.



Six states have passed some form of school choice program this year, including both voucher and tax credit legislation. Progress in educational reform has developed largely in the aftermath of the 2010 elections. “I think that there’s long been an interest among Republican legislators, but this year is the first time they’ve gained so many seats in so many states and gained majorities,” asserted Josh Cunningham, a member of the state legislatures group. “There was a window of opportunity to get these bills passed. It was kind of the perfect timing.”

Before 2011, 20 school choice programs — including both voucher and tax credit programs — were being [administered](#) across 12 states and Washington, D.C., and serving nearly 200,000 students, according to the Alliance for School Choice. The Alliance, the largest organization in the U.S. promoting school choice programs, releases an award-winning yearly report, the School Choice Yearbook, which documents the “research-tested benefits” of educational choice.

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This year’s edition, titled the “Hope for America’s Children,” comprises a “2010-11 Research Recap” which chronicles student achievement for school choice programs throughout the country. According to the study, students who received vouchers from the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) — the nation’s oldest voucher program — [tested](#) as well or better than fellow students with similar demographic and socioeconomic strata.

MPCP students in fourth grade performed 25 percent higher in national percentile rank in reading and 54 percent higher in science than their similarly disadvantaged peers. Eighth grade students tested 33 percent higher in national percentile rank in reading, 32 percent higher in math, and 68 percent higher in science than their similarly disadvantaged peers.

Results from the School Choice Demonstration Project’s Milwaukee Longitudinal School Choice



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Evaluation said, “As shown by the comparison with the [National Assessment of Educational Progress] percentile ranks, students in the MPCP are performing at higher levels than similar low-income students in large cities in the U.S. In addition, a 2010 study demonstrated that MPCP participants posted graduation rates that were 18 percent higher than their public school counterparts.”

Student performance in other parts of the country was just as remarkable. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) — [dismantled](#) by the Obama administration and democratic majority in 2009 — generated graduation rates of 91 percent, 21 percent higher than students who applied for but were refused a scholarship. The OSP voucher system was constructed in an impoverished area with severely impaired schooling, and students who did not receive scholarships fell victim to the floundering D.C. public school system.

But student attainment is not the only benefit school choice delivered to the D.C. area. Four studies from Georgetown University and the University of Arkansas [found](#) that voucher parents are “very satisfied, more involved in their children’s education, and becoming savvy educational consumers.” Parents of Florida tax credit students also reported superb approval ratings, as 95.4 percent were satisfied with the program, rating their children’s schools as “excellent” or “good.”

Though these conclusions pose positive results, critics suggest that vouchers would ultimately lead to a regulatory capture of private schools. Economist Lew Rockwell, president of the Ludwig von Mises Institute [explained](#) that vouchers are a “big-government program that increases, not reduces, the role of government in education, and will turn any institution taking vouchers into a carbon copy of state schools themselves.”

The Alliance for the Separation of School and State advocates a complete privatization of American education. From the organization’s [home page](#), “If this seems like an impossible idea, consider that 8 million children already learn free of state control. We’re not starting from scratch here. The snowball of educational independence is already rolling.” Indeed, though it will take time, the ultimate goal is to eliminate government from the educational equation, and return parents, and students themselves, to the forefront of education.

In the end, vouchers would inevitably lead to government interference. But despite this fact, the advancement in private school attainment — which stems from school choice — reveals the importance of distancing government from the classroom, and returning the authority back to those whom the Founders intended, and that is students, parents, teachers, and local communities.



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